REACH | ESCAPE

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Herding Movement

Game Chef 2016

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PROLOGUE

You're standing about ten feet away from the edge of a building's rooftop. It's warm out, but there's a light wind rustling your hair and pulling at the loose edges of your shirt. You breath in deeply and pause for just a moment before exhaling. This is it. It's just you, the ledge, and nothing but open sky between this building and the next. A siren sounds somewhere in the distance. Is it possible you tripped an alarm on your way up from the fifteenth floor? No. Never. You're too careful. Too good at what you do. As soon as Blewett wraps up, you'll both just slide down the fire ladder onto the street and -

A second siren sounds, closer this time, the two cutting sounds chorusing together in a brash cadence that raises the hair on your arms.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no."

You turn as the rooftop access door bangs open, the clanging resounding from the stairwell below and into the night. Your squad member, Blewett, trips as he crests the final stair and tumbles gracelessly into a heap at your feet. Before you can even extend a hand to help him, he scrambles to his feet.

"We need to go **now**. I did a bad thing. A very bad thing. I'm pretty sure there was wire across the "

Three, four, five… dozens more sirens pick up around you and drown out his explanation. He shrugs and tosses you a first sized package, wrapped in brown paper. You tuck it into your backpack and sling the straps back around your shoulders. It's time to go. You turn and face the empty space in front of you, now backlit with an alternating flash of red and blue. Knowing that you'll start shaking if you hesitate a second more, you lean forward and start to run. You've done a similar jump a thousand times in the woods behind your apartment complex. It's the same exact distance across… with a skinned knee being the most severe consequences if you trip over your own feet and undershoot the fallen tree trunk you use to practice. Still. It's kind of the same thing. How did you break your technique down again? Long step left, long step right, short step left, gather your arms and throw them upward for a little more momentum as your feet leave the ground.

With that thought, you're airborne. Blewett rockets into the air beside you, less than half a step behind and far more graceful than his ability to walk up stairs would lead you to believe. In the few seconds you're hanging there, suspended in the air, a thousand things cross your mind. Did you push off that ledge hard enough? Did you remember to jump up and not just straight out? Is the weight of your backpack going to throw you off balance a bit when you try to land? If you end up jumping short and having to grab the ledge, are you going to be able to catch yourself, hold on, and – ideally – clamber up onto the roof? What if -?

No, there's no time to ponder the details. There is just movement. Below, police swarm the building you just left, strapping scanners and detectors to their wrists and helmets. Robotic dogs sit patiently at their sides, ready to spring into action with a simple command. If anyone else had hit the building, it would be a good response plan. Most thieves would bunker down and fire on some camo projections to move invisibly through the halls. They might project several frequencies meant to throw the dogs for a loop and create havoc on the communication lines. They would hack the video feeds and play cat and mouse trying to outplay the police hackers. They would fight technology with technology, something you've found to be a bit of a losing battle. The side with the most funding wins.

It's almost inconceivable that someone would risk jumping rooftops. When medical bills typically exceed the cost of a black market cloaking device, why would you? When so much of life scoffs at the supposed potential of the human body, who would turn down a free backlog of the best media and the economical thrill of a first person shooter to go outside and sweat? It's too hot, too dangerous, too weird, too… just why?

Because the world least expects it.

With a light jolt, your feet come together meet the concrete ledge with a muted thump. You take your momentum and throw yourself into a shoulder roll, moving awkwardly across the backpack, but coming out onto your feet, in much better shape than you would be if you had taken all the force in your knees. You exchange a look with Blewett and flash a quick set of finger guns before turning to survey the next ledge. Five more roofs to go.

ESCAPING REACH

Tracers have chosen a different path in life. In a world of tempered societal order where skipping steps on your way to work and jumping up on a rail just to see if you could balance on it would earn you a dozen stares and a harsh word from a policeman, no one plans for the person going against the grain. When you spend your entire day jacked into your phone or computer, it's nearly impossible to imagine the person working one desk over might be able to scale a parking garage with nothing but his bare hands. When you've spend your last dozen evenings binge watching that series with the talking cat, it just doesn't feel like something the human body should be able to do. Where would you even start? Just go outside and start climbing a parking garage? It seems stupid.

It's this mentality that Tracers capitalize on. With ever advancing security technology, they were faced a losing battle to outclass the newest device on the market. The side with the fewer resources –inevitably the small squads of Tracers - was always doomed. As such, Tracers take advantage of this modern blindness and have worked to shape themselves into the ultimate weapons, realizing that the largest vulnerability in modern security installations is simply the human body. Tracers train themselves to think and to move in unexpected and often primal ways. They train their bodies to become both strong and useful by turning every day urban infrastructure into limitless playgrounds, dancing over obstacles you'd never find in a gym. They train their minds to be able to see a railing not as a barrier, but as an effortless springboard to journey up and over the otherwise unreachable wall behind it.
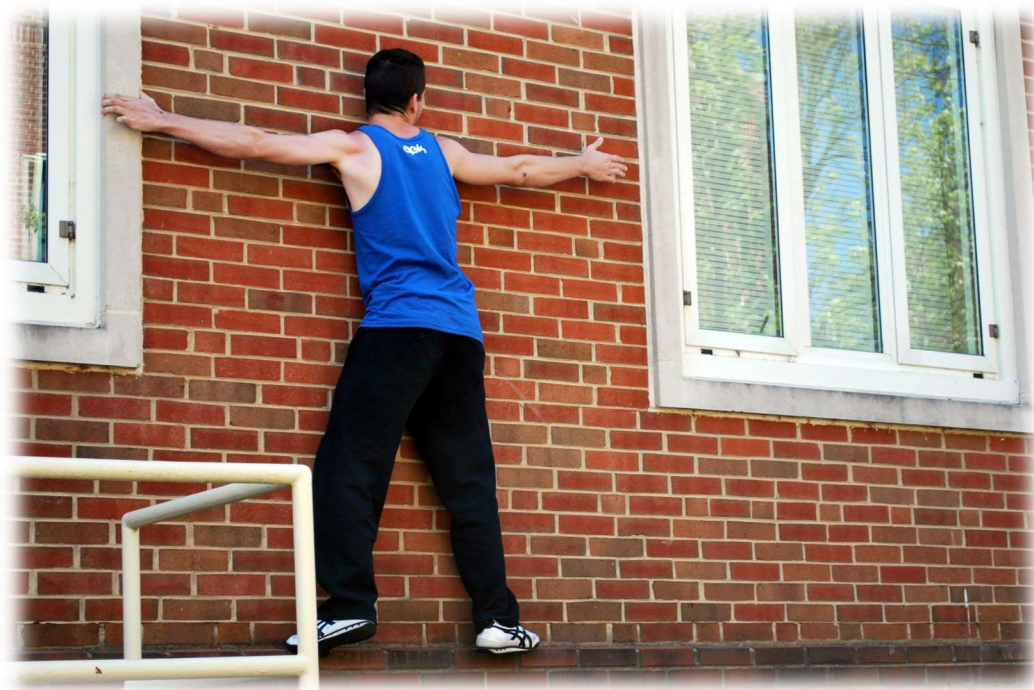
In **REACH│ESCAPE**, you have chosen to begin to walk the path of a Tracer. You reject the uniformity and conformity of modern society and have begun to dig deep back to humanity's roots to rediscover what it is that humans have evolved to do. You will utilize all the skills that your body was made to do – balancing, crawling, running, rolling, climbing, vaulting, jumping, rough housing – to avoid the cameras and security systems that expect you to take the most obvious routes to and from your Contract. In doing so, you will train to mind to see the world a little differently, something I hope you'll carry through to your life outside the bounds of the game.

While some Tracers work as lone wolf operations, many Tracers operate in small units. Your particular squad specializes in two specific tasks – REACH and ESCAPE. Some days, that may mean delivering messages to a high ranking official the second he steps out of a meeting and onto a rooftop balcony for a quick smoke. Some nights, it may mean clasping a forbidden pendant to your chest while running through storm drains and rolling through inches of better-left-uninvestigated muck to escape snarling dogs and sweeping search lights.

Once you feel prepared to take on your first Contract, you can decide exactly what kind of Tracer you'll be. In **REACH│ESCAPE**, you choose your clients. You choose your Contracts. The path you take to exploring your own physical and mental capabilities is entirely up to you. If you want play Robin Hood, go forth and do good work. If you're just a silent agent of chaos, sowing confusion with every jewel and mob missive you secret away, have fun watching your back at night. Fancy being an unassuming businessman or women during the day and a masked figure protecting strangers in the night? Do that! There is only one philosophy that is universal to all Tracers: Get from POINT A to POINT B as quickly and efficiently as you can.

Oh, and don't get caught. You saw what happened to the last squad that set off an alarm mid-Run. It wasn't pretty.

CHARACTER CREATION: THE MAKING OF A TRACER

Character creation in **REACH│ESCAPE** is unlike character creation in any other system you have ever played. Many tabletop games recommend you set aside an entire game session just for character creation so that you can take the time to build a group template to give the player characters a narrative reason to stick together throughout the length of the campaign - a Contract Zero, as it were. In **REACH│ESCAPE**, Contract Zero is an actual game session for your entire squad to take part in. It uses all of the base mechanics of a full game, but keeps things as simple as possible so that you can focus on just learning the game. It is the only Contract included in this ruleset. We'll still break down the process of preparing for Contract Zero into several smaller steps, but after this sentence, we're more or less going right to the action. Buckle up.

STEP 1: ASSEMBLE YOUR SQUAD

As mentioned before, **REACH│ESCAPE** can be played entirely solo, but I highly recommend gathering a group of friends, spawning/borrowing a hoard of children, or removing your cat from his perfectly comfortable sunbeam by the window to build your Squad to experience the game with. As seen below, there is clearly no necessary experience level or fitness ability or species requirements to play this game.

Here you can see I have assembled the Borderlands Pack.
We prefer the term Pack instead of Squad because it makes us feel special.

STEP 2: GEAR UP

No Tracer is complete without two things: comfortable, weather appropriate clothing and a pair well-fitting tennis shoes/sneakers. There's nothing particularly special about either of piece of equipment – we just don't want you getting an additional public nudity charge tacked onto your extensive list of crimes when you set off a motion sensor. Hopefully it goes without saying, but every Tracer in your squad will require their own (their own shoes and clothing… not nudity charge).

You will also need several pieces of shared equipment (one set per squad of Tracers): a printed copy of the Contract included at the end of this manual (Contract Zero for your first game!), a pencil or pen, and a roll of blue painter's tape.

Optional, but highly recommended equipment includes drinking water and several small handfuls of confetti to celebrate when the mission is complete.

Here you see Carbon violating the essential clothing equipment rule.
Children, avert your eyes.

STEP 3: STAKE OUT YOUR STRIKEPOINT

At this point, we're almost ready to go out and play the game. Before heading out, you'll want to pull out your printed Contract and flip it over to the blank reverse side. Grab your pen and sketch a large grid on the page. We'll use this grid to define the boundaries of our Strikepoint – the location we're going to hit to carry out the Contract. A typical Strikepoint is defined on a 5x5 grid.
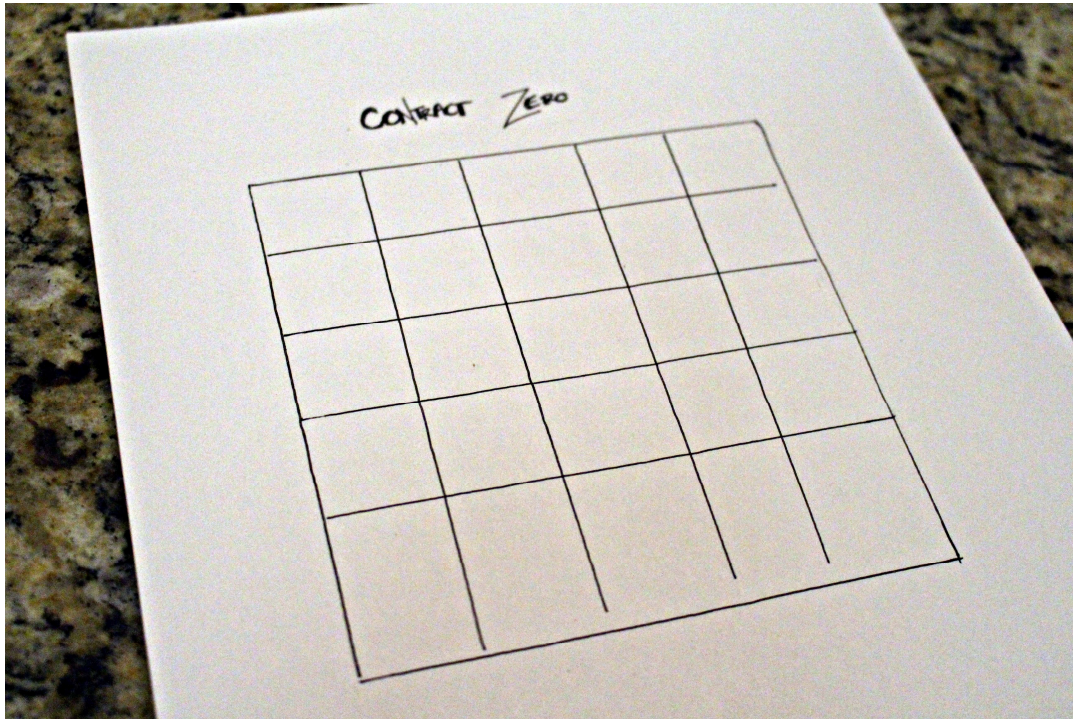
Here is an example of a Strikepoint Grid.
Notice how the squares are not perfectly symmetrical
and the world is still somehow turning.

Now we're going to stake out our Strikepoint. Staking out your Strikepoint helps identify all the Alarmed Systems that you might encounter on your Run. If this is your first time out on a Run in awhile and you're just planning on going out for a little training, don't feel the need to include any Alarmed Systems. For a typical Contract though, you're going to want to determine where the Alarmed Systems are by using your 5x5 grid. There are several methods available to identify where the Alarmed Systems are located. Use whatever scientifically proven method works best for your squad.

Method 1:

- Drop a small rock or other object on your grid and mark the closest square as an Alarmed System. Resolve any disputes about which square the rock falls closest to by dropping a small rock on each of your squadmember's heads and adding one additional Alarmed System for every future complaint.

Method 2:

- Arbitrarily choose.

Method 3:

- Letter the left side of the grid with the vowels A, E, I, O, and U. Number the bottom of the grid from 1 to 5. Write down every vowel found in the names of your Squad members. Count how many of each vowel occurs. Place an alarmed system in the row and column that corresponds with each letter and the number of times it occurs. For any occurrences greater than 5, place the Alarmed System in column 5. For Tracers who insist that "Y" is a vowel, treat Y's as wildcards and place them in a square of your choosing. Resolve disputes by firing all squadmembers with Y's in their name.

This exquisite piece of art shows a completed Strikepoint for Contract Zero.

The number of Alarmed Systems you build into your Contract generally determines its difficulty. If you're playing Contract Zero, I recommend a healthy minimum of 1 Alarmed System per member of your squad. That's generally a good rule of thumb unless otherwise specified by the Contract.

STEP 4: TRAVELING TO THE TARGET LOCATION

Now it's time to choose your Target Location for your Contract to go down in. Because Contract Zero is primarily an exploration Contract, your squad can be pretty flexible in choosing the location. Some Contracts will have more restraints on where you can play, but **REACH│ESCAPE** is designed to be as flexible as possible to accommodate all environments. After much playtesting, the Borderlands Pack recommends one of the following locations for Contract Zero:

- An empty or low traffic playground.
- A parking lot or park with interesting concrete features
- A series of picnic tables
- A wooded area with large stones or downed trees.
- An elaborate arrangement of hay bales.

Wherever you choose to play out your Contract, we just recommend somewhere relatively safe with no large drops or spiky, impalement-happy objects. We don't want any angry letters.

A somewhat sketchy wooded area in a local park with some mysteriously downed trees serves as a great Target Location for Contract Zero.
*Or at least it did until some scary motorcyclists showed up to smoke "cigarettes".*
We quickly chose a new location.

STEP 5: FIELDWORK

Once you reach the location, select a squad member to quickly sketch the major features of the location onto your Strikepoint grid. There doesn't have to be a lot detail in this, just include the largest structures and features so that you could reference your Contract later and remember where you worked.


This is where the Borderlands Pack played out Contract Zero.
It's just a parking lot and it represents just how little you can get away
When shopping for a Target Location.
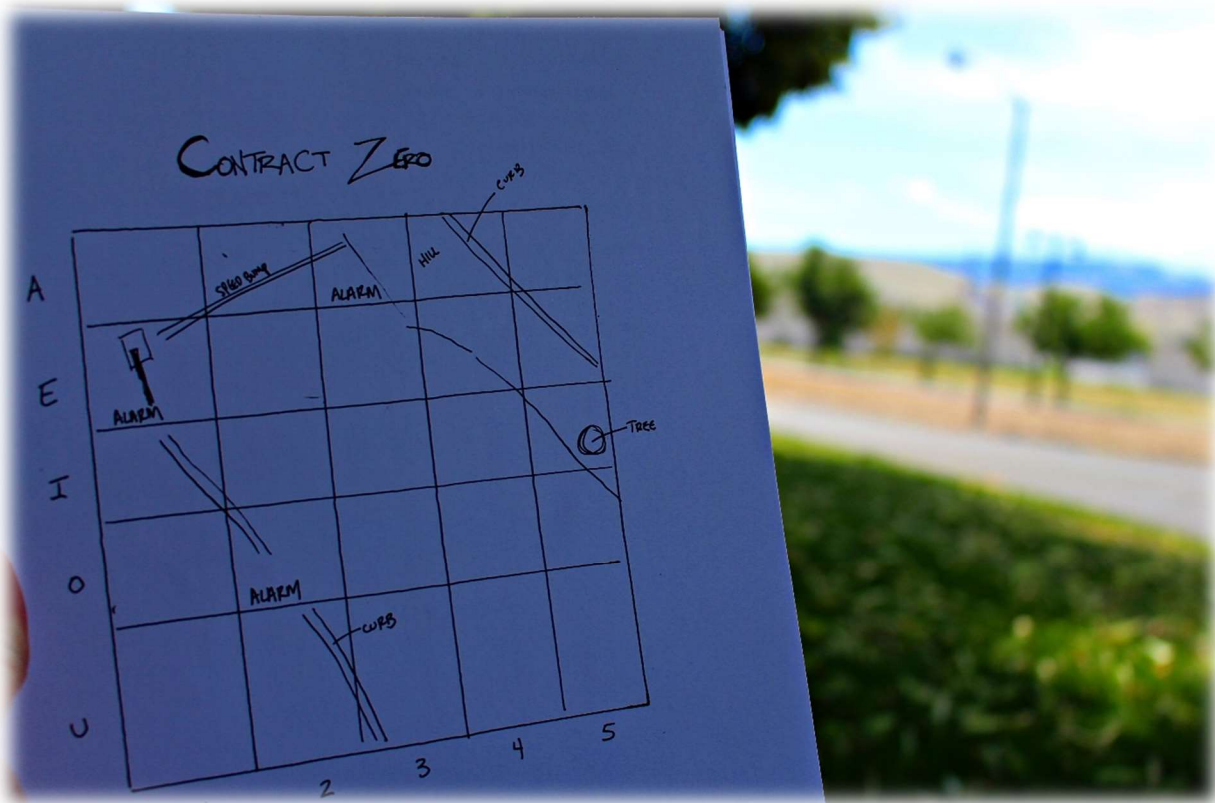
This is my annotated Strikepoint grid.
If it wasn't clear from my poor layout and photo editing abilities,
I'm an engineer, not an artist.

Now check the grid squares you marked as Alarmed Systems before you arrived. This is where your painter's tape comes in. Find the areas of the Target Location that are marked as Alarmed Systems and lay a piece of painter's tape across that area. Many Contracts will specify the layouts of the Alarmed System, but for Contract Zero, you can do what you like. We recommend placing two, six inch pieces of tape for each Alarmed System with some space in between them to make them difficult, but not impossible to avoid.
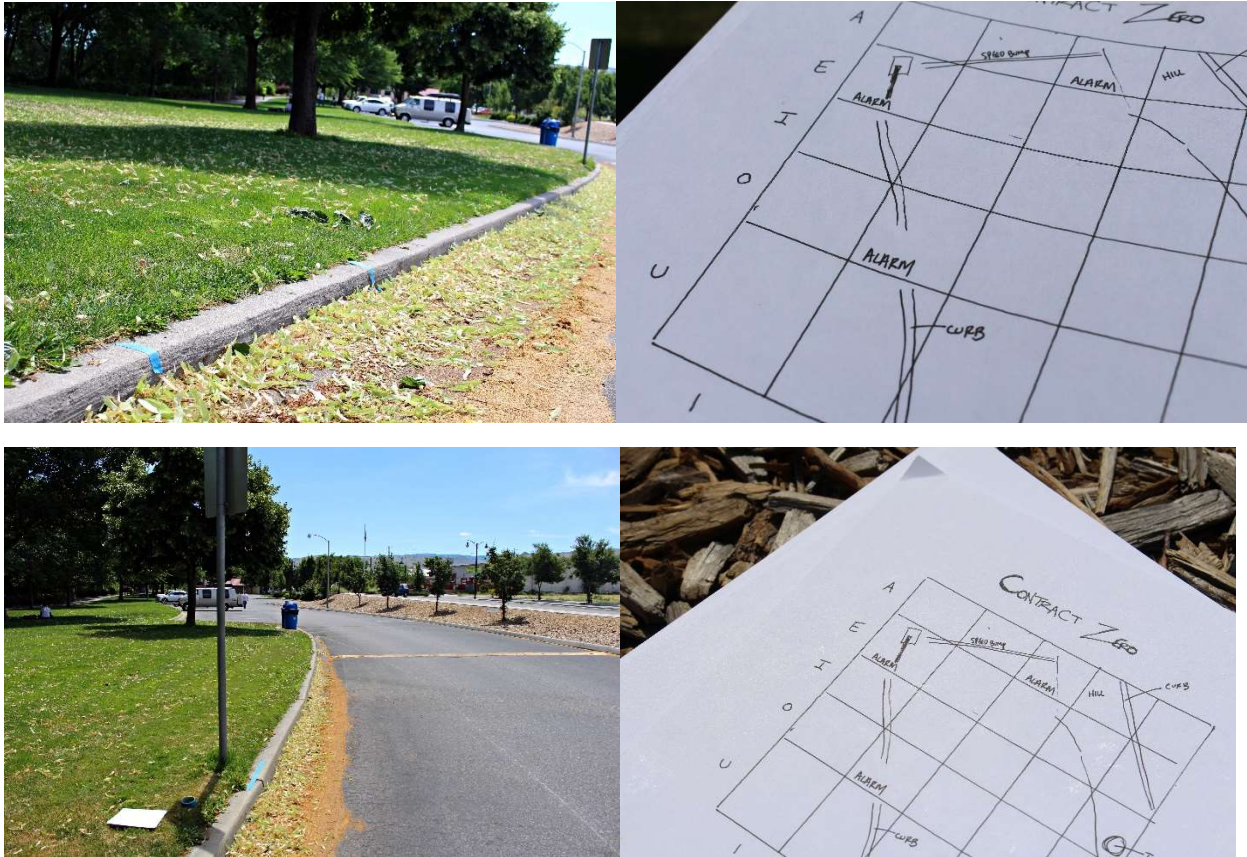
A beautiful montage of my Alarmed Systems and their
corresponding locations on the Strikepoint grid (2 of 3 pictured).

Alarmed Systems act as complications for your Run. If you ever step on an Alarmed System or a boundary marked out by an Alarmed System, you must immediately restart your Run from the beginning and endure one round of friendly trash talk from your Squad. Some Contracts have more severe repercussions for triggering an Alarmed System, but we don't want too many tears during Contract Zero.

Taylor tries out some slick new moves to avoid an Alarmed System...
And discovers that wet wood is always slicker.
There was some instant regret.
Carbon was unimpressed

Now it's time to get to work, Tracers. I recommend you start every Contract with a light jog around the Target Location and some warm-up stretching.

CONTRACT ZERO: A NEW BEGINNING (FULL VERSION)

NOTE: There is a picture-free, text-light, one page version of this Contract at the end of the book. I suggest printing that for your field copy of this Contract. This annotated, picture-heavy version is just for you to review before play so that feel comfortable answering any questions a Squadmember may have while working through the training exercise.

The first step for every Tracer is to start developing the concept of a Run. A Run is a series of fluid movements that take you from Point A to Point B, over, around, through, and between any number of obstacles along the way. The movements that take the Tracer through the obstacles will likely be different for every Tracer. What is efficient movement for one person may not apply to another with a different body type or ability level. We could talk about this for hours, but it's much easier to understand if you experience it yourself.

This Contract breaks down into a series of **Challenges** and **Evaluations**. The Challenges are the actions you must take as a Squad to complete the Contract. This may take more than more than one day in the field, depending on the complexity of the Challenge. Each Challenge comes with a paired Evaluation. The Evaluation guides you through some analysis of the Challenge you just completed, which will direct you toward the movement philosophy or technique being conveyed by the Challenge. I recommend talking through the Evaluations as a Squad after completing each associated Challenge.

If you cannot complete a Challenge, that's okay! Figure out what you need to do to improve on the skills required by the Challenge and come back out to fight another day. Contracts are designed to be played an infinite number of times and they can be broken up into multiple sessions.

During playtesting, I also found that many Squad members enjoyed noting down the Challenges in a training journal and writing out their Evaluation responses so that they could look back and remember the Contract. This would be useful if you're planning on working the same Contract multiple times and want to track your improvement.

Challenge 1: As a Squad choose a Run by studying your surroundings and designating an arbitrary Point A and Point B that have several obstacles in the way. Move between Point A and Point B (a straight or squiggly pass. No one's judging.), traversing as many obstacles as possible. Pay attention to movements and obstacles that make you feel clumsy or are awkward to traverse.


This is my response to Challenge 1. The red line marks the Run I planned between Point A and Point B. The asphalt and grass are considered lava for my Run. The blue circles indicate the Alarmed Systems I marked out with painter's tape.

Evaluation 1: Finished? Awesome! Now take a moment to study the route you just took and think of a better way to traverse that space. Is there a movement you can try that might get you over a troublesome object a little faster or more smoothly?

Over time, Tracers have standardized a set of movements that they've consistently found work better than others. By working through other Contracts, you'll discover many of these for yourself organically, but the long term design goal for **REACH│ESCAPE** is to codify them with pictures as well.

Challenge 2: Repeat your Run, applying your new techniques and ideas
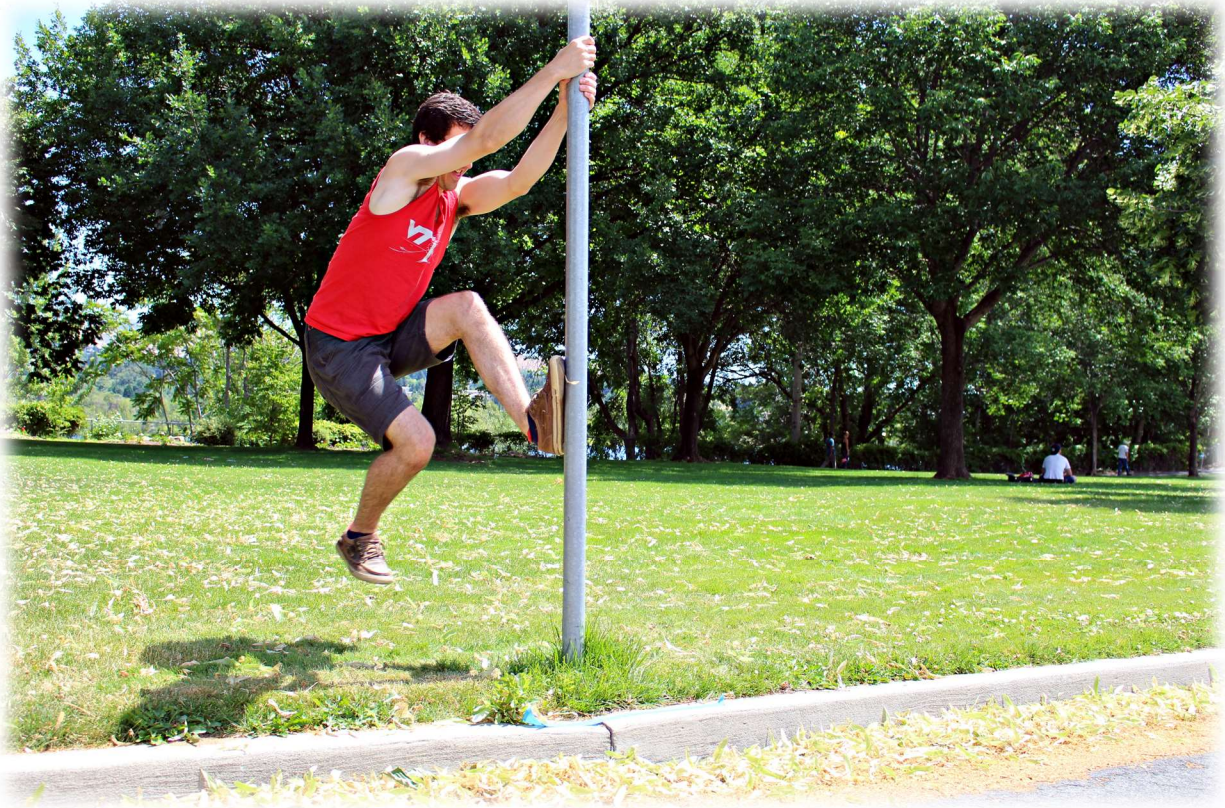
*Dylan realizes he can move around this sign post a lot faster with a swinging motion.
It has the added bonus of helping him avoid the Alarmed System.*

Evaluation 2: Let's stop and evaluate again. What worked? What didn't? If something failed or felt awkward, was it because of a lack of strength or a skill that you haven't learned yet? Not sure at this point? No problem. You will develop a better ability to analyze your movements with practice.

Challenge 3: Run your route in reverse. Point A is now Point B.

Taylor discovers that her Run is much easier in reverse
since she doesn't have to jump UP the hill.
Landing without sliding onto the asphalt is a little trickier though.

Evaluation 3: What was different about the movements you had to use? Was there anything new about the route that came to your attention?

Challenge 4: Time to get down and dirty. Many Contracts require squeezing through tight spaces (air vents, drains, and the like), so let's do this! Get down on your palms and the balls of your feet. Move through your route in either direction, keeping low to ground and keeping three points of contact as much as you can.

Revel in the fact that you probably look like a really clumsy spiderman right now. How many games provide that experience?

Evaluation 4: Did any obstacles become easier to cross while you bonded with the local earthworms? Why? Did any become more difficult? Why?

Challenge 5: Last round for Contract Zero: Let's work your Run one more time in the direction of your choosing, using your discretion about which movements you choose.

Dylan adds some flair to his run by using a nearby post to avoid an Alarmed System.

Evaluation 5: How much better was that than your first Run? Could you run it even better tomorrow? Good! Because I have a new Contract waiting for you…

CONTRACT ZERO: A NEW BEGINNING (FIELD COPY)

Alarmed System Response: Restart your Run from the beginning.

Challenge 1: As a Squad choose a Run by studying your surroundings and designating an arbitrary Point A and Point B that have several obstacles in the way. Move between Point A and Point B (a straight or squiggly pass. No one's judging.), traversing as many obstacles as possible. Pay attention to movements and obstacles that make you feel clumsy or are awkward to traverse.

Evaluation 1: Finished? Awesome! Now take a moment to study the route you just took and think of a better way to traverse that space. Is there a movement you can try that might get you over a troublesome object a little faster or more smoothly?

Challenge 2: Repeat your Run, applying your new techniques and ideas

Evaluation 2: Let's stop and evaluate again. What worked? What didn't? If something failed or felt awkward, was it because of a lack of strength or a skill that you haven't learned yet? Not sure at this point? No problem. You will develop a better ability to analyze your movements with practice.

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Evaluation 5: How much better was that than your first Run? Could you run it even better tomorrow? Good! Because I have a new Contract waiting for you…

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I've been practicing parkour for about 3 years now. The biggest struggle for me in parkour is figuring out how to get other people involved. It's one of the most accessible sports on the planet, but nobody seems to have clear direction on where to begin. There are hundreds of Youtube videos, but I much prefer one on one instruction. That's not always possible and more than one potential traceur (yes, that's the actual term for a parkour practitioner and I probably gave a lot of them aneurysms by saying Tracer…) has been sucked into a cycle of just clicking through videos and never actually making it out their front door. I want to figure out a way to solve that problem by removing technology from the equation and providing just enough guidance for people to go explore their capabilities on their own without ever feeling directionless.

REACH│ESCAPE is the first draft of my answer to that mystery.

If you enjoyed the game, let me know! I can reached on Twitter @HerdingMovement or by email at anonymousforensic@gmail.com .